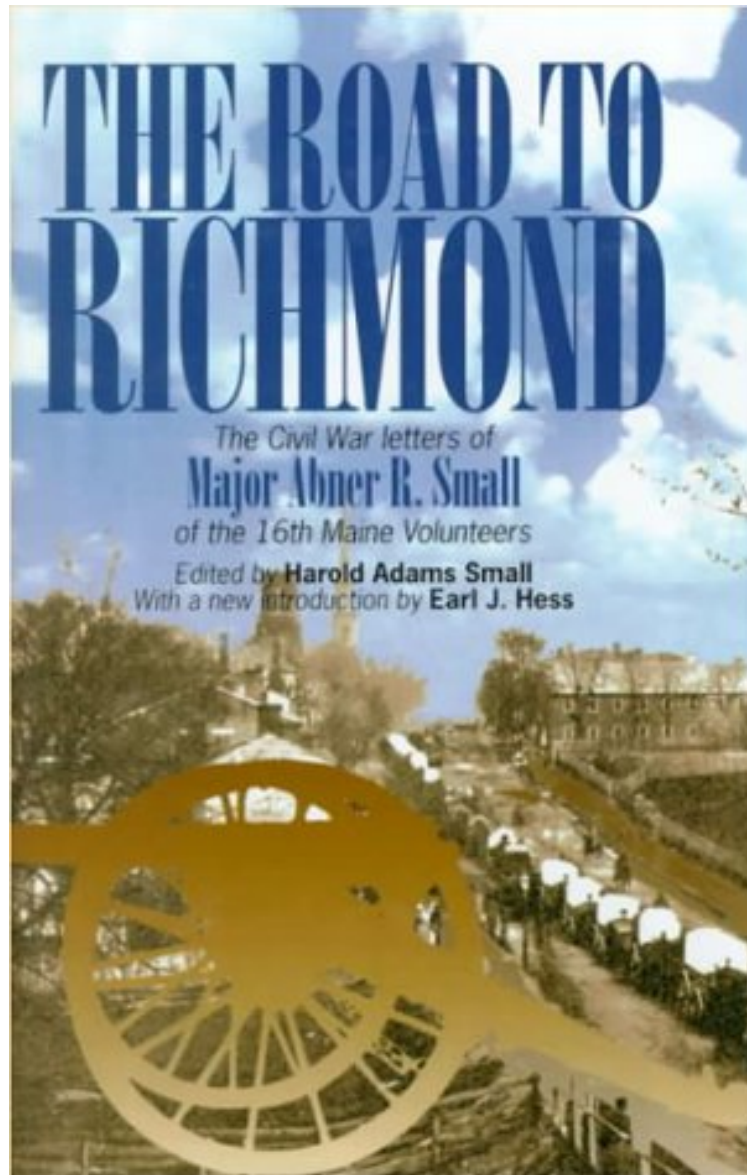


[FREE] The Road to Richmond: The Civil War Letters of Major Abner R. Small of the 16th Maine Volunteers. (The North's Civil War)

## **The Road to Richmond: The Civil War Letters of Major Abner R. Small of the 16th Maine Volunteers. (The North's Civil War)**

*Harold A. Small*

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**Harold A. Small : The Road to Richmond: The Civil War Letters of Major Abner R. Small of the 16th Maine Volunteers. (The North's Civil War)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Road to Richmond: The Civil War Letters of Major Abner R. Small of the 16th Maine Volunteers. (The North's Civil War):

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Gem of a Memoir By Andrew Hall It's rare to find a truly memorable wartime memoir written by an "ordinary" soldier. Most are seriously flawed in one way or another. Perhaps memories are dulled by the passage of time, or subconsciously altered by the author's exposure to media hype. All too often it's painfully obvious that most memoirists are not professional writers or even very good story tellers. Every now and then, however, a diamond will emerge from the rough ore that makes up the mass of the genre -- Eugene Sledge's "With The Old Breed" immediately springs to mind -- and we'll be treated to a memoir that combines poignancy, honesty and genuine narrative skill. Abner Small's "The Road to Richmond" is one of those uncommon gems, a wartime memoir that captures the full spectrum of emotions and experiences endured by a common soldier, never falling into the trap of glorification, or pretending to offer glib, easy answers. Small was an ordinary citizen from a small town in Maine at the outbreak of the Civil War. He was one of the early volunteers, and he managed to survive the entire conflict, experiencing along the way nearly everything a volunteer soldier could experience -- day-to-day boredom in the long periods waiting for operations to commence, routine life in camp and on the march, combat as a skirmisher and in line of battle, and a POW. During his service, he kept a diary, even while in Confederate prisons. Many years after the war, he used his diary and his letters home as the basis for his memoir. The truly amazing thing is that Small, without the benefit of an extensive education, had a natural talent for writing. While he always remained active in GAR veteran's groups, he never became enamored of his service, or combat in general, even when time, society and the media of his day tended glorify and make heroes of those who fought. He portrays himself as an ordinary soldier caught up in the whirlpools of events, neither heroic nor cowardly. His ambivalence toward war comes through clearly, yet he just as clearly feels he was part of something much larger and greater than himself. He doesn't pretend to have the answers to the larger questions dissected by historians. He didn't regret his service, but he also didn't buy the concept of "Heroic War". He had the rare ability to portray his ideas and memories in clear, concise, vivid prose. He had the knack of finding wonderful metaphors to convey his points. Even more surprising, his style of writing translates very well to a 21st century audience. Readers today won't find his writing stilted, wordy, or dated, as is so often the case with works from the Victorian era. His writing shows just how similar we still are to our 19th century forebears. It's an example of the kind of concise writing Strunk and White would approve of. The one weakness in Small's memoir is when he tries to convey the larger movements of the armies. When he talks of this regiment, or that brigade moving to the left or right, rather than simply what he or his immediate comrades saw, he tends toward the dull, flat and pedantic. This is in part because his intended audience -- other veterans -- were of course privy to how Civil War armies were organized and moved on the battlefield, whereas this type of esoterica is alien to later generations. Critics far more knowledgeable than me rate this book very high, and I can see why. I would certainly place "Road to Richmond" among the top 5 best wartime memoirs by ordinary soldiers I have read. Very highly recommended for any Civil War enthusiast, or anyone interested in an honest, poignant look into the hard life of a soldier/sailor.

Abner Small wrote one of the most honest, poignant, and moving memoirs to come out of the Civil War. He served as a non-commissioned officer in the Third Maine Infantry during the summer of 1861, experiencing battle for the first time at First Bull Run. As a recruiting officer, he helped to raise the Sixteenth Maine Infantry and served as its adjutant. The Sixteenth Maine gained fame for its heroic delaying action on July 1 at Gettysburg, where it lost 180 of its 200 men. It went on to serve in Grant's Overland Campaign in Virginia. Small was an articulate observer of all this. He wrote his memoirs with a keen sense of the irony of life during wartime, and with a gift for expression. His descriptions of the dead at Gettysburg, his characterizations of famous men such as Major General Oliver Otis Howard, and his reflections on the emotions of men under fire are outstanding. Small was captured in the battle of Globe Tavern on August 18, 1864. His account of prison life at Libby, Salisbury, and Danville is gripping. Small was exchanged just in time to lead his regiment in the final days of the war. His book reveals more of the inner soldier than almost any other account written by a Union veteran.